

Findings from the Dakota County *Smart Choices* School Nutrition Environment Survey - July 2009

Creating a healthier food environment in schools can have a positive impact on the health of both students and staff. In addition, research is accumulating that well-nourished, physically active children perform better academically.

The Assessment of the School Nutrition Environment was conducted by school staff in 42 buildings (37 schools) across five school districts in Dakota County following a specific protocol in March of 2009. At least two to four building staff were asked to come to a consensus about common practices in their buildings related to the school nutrition environment. Counts were taken of the foods available for purchase in various venues to identify the relative availability of healthier choices, especially fruits and vegetables. Cafeteria sales data of healthier options was provided by district food service directors. "Healthier choice" items were defined based on Nutrition Standards for Foods in School developed by the Institute of Medicine (see appendix).

The assessment is the first step in the "Smart Choices" Initiative that will be launched in September of 2009. The goal of Smart Choices is to create a healthier food environment for students, staff and the community. Thus, contributing to enhanced academic achievement, improved health and, ultimately, reduced health care costs. The program is funded by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota.

Availability of Healthy Options	Elementary	Middle	High
Cafeteria a la carte beverages considered healthy	100%	56%	49%
Cafeteria a la carte beverages which are 100% fruit or vegetable juices	73%	22%	25%
Cafeteria a la carte beverages which are calorie-free/artificially sweetened	0%	10%	13%
Cafeteria a la carte foods considered healthy	70%	54%	40%
Cafeteria a la carte foods that are fruits and vegetables	21%	10%	8%
Concession beverages considered healthy	9%	NA	29%
Concession beverages which are calorie-free/ artificially sweetened	45%	NA	27%
Concession foods considered healthy	0%	NA	26%
Snack carts/school stores beverages considered healthy	100%	29%	11%
Snack carts/school stores foods considered healthy	48%	26%	16%
Vending beverages considered healthy (accessible only to staff in elementary schools)	9%	36%	36%
Vending beverages which are 100% fruit or vegetable juices	9%	4%	3%
Vending beverages which are calorie-free/ artificially sweetened	39%	14%	40%
Vending foods considered healthy (accessible only to staff in elementary schools)	17%	27%	14%
Vending foods that are fruits and vegetables	0%	1%	0%

Note: Only 18 of the 24 elementary schools answered the above questions because they do not sell food outside of the school lunch program.

Current Common Practices	Elementary	Middle	High
Nutrition criteria established for foods served outside the school lunch program	45%	50%	48%
Students/Staff have access to healthy appealing options in a la carte lines	62%	75%	80%
Provide at least 20 minutes for students to eat lunch, once seated	58%	62%	60%
Students have recess before lunch	50%	NA	NA
Don't allow fast food in the cafeteria	20%	25%	20%
Cafeteria provides calorie information	16%	25%	0%
Opportunity to taste test fruits, vegetables and other healthy foods	54%	50%	40%
Price healthy options lower (66% elementary indicated question NA)	4%	12%	20%
Incorporate nutrition education in the classroom curriculum	87%	62%	80%
Opportunity to grow fruits and vegetables at school	12%	13%	0%
Opportunity to take healthy cooking classes at school	4%	50%	60%

Do not allow or limit less healthy foods as rewards (40% high schools indicated question NA)	62%	25%	40%
Allow only plain water in classrooms	29%	75%	40%
Offer healthy options for <u>classroom</u> parties & celebrations	54%	12%	40%
Offer healthy options for <u>school</u> events & celebrations (40% high schools indicated question NA)	66%	25%	20%
Vending machines contain only foods that meet healthy criteria	NA	NA	60%
Foods sold for fundraising meet nutrition criteria	20%	12%	40%
Promote healthy food options through marketing & communication strategies	70%	50%	60%
Do not allow advertising of less healthy foods & beverages	66%	75%	60%
Provide parents with a list of acceptable "healthy" snacks for snack time	75%	NA	NA
Encourage families to bring healthy foods for bag lunches	70%	12%	40%
Communicate wellness policies to students, staff and parents each year	79%	50%	40%
In-service training for staff to encourage healthy eating among students	33%	0%	40%
Encourage staff to model healthy eating for students	62%	12%	60%
Offer weight management & wellness programs for staff	91%	100%	80%
Identify & refer students with eating & nutritional health issues	91%	87%	80%
School Cafeteria A la Carte Sales	Elementary	Middle	High
Healthy Food	20%	5%	19%
Fruit	2%	.1%	2%
Vegetables	3%	0%	.5%
Healthy Beverages	100%	48%	53%
Low-fat Milk	85%	19%	17%
100% Fruit Juice	7%	13%	9%

Participating Dakota County School Districts (24 Elementary Schools (ES), 8 Middle Schools (MS), 5 High Schools (HS))

Independent School District 191 - Burnsville, Eagan (10 ES, 3 MS, 1 HS)

Independent School District 192 – Farmington (4 ES, 2 MS, 1 HS)

Independent School District 195 – Randolph (1 ES, 1 HS)

Independent School District 197 – Mendota Heights, West St. Paul (5 ES, 2 MS, 1 HS)

Independent School District 200 – Hastings (4 ES, 1 MS, 1 HS)

Appendix: Institute of Medicine Nutrition Standards for Foods in School

(<http://www.iom.edu/Object.File/Master/42/628/fact%20sheet.pdf>)

Snack Foods

- No more than 200 calories per package
- No more than 35% of total calories from fat
- Less than 10% of total calories from saturated fat
- Zero Trans Fat (\leq 0.5 g per serving)
- No more than 35% of total calories from added sugars (except yogurt, food containing fruit)
- No more than 200 mg. sodium per package.

A la carte Entrées

Items meet fat and sugar limits as listed above and:

- Are National School Lunch Program (NSLP) menu items
- Have a sodium content of 480 mg or less
- The 200-calorie limit does not apply; items cannot exceed calorie content of comparable NSLP entrée items.

Beverages

- Water without flavoring, additives, or carbonation
- Low-fat and nonfat milk (in 8 oz portions):
 - Lactose-free and soy beverages are included
 - Flavored milk with no more than 22 g or total sugars per 8 o-oz. portion
- 100% fruit juice in 4-oz portion as packaged for elementary/middle school and 8 oz. portions for high-school (Please note recommended portion size, but count all 100% fruit juices as "Healthy Items" for this Nutrition Assessment)
- Caffeine-free, with the exception of trace amounts of naturally occurring caffeine substances